

**P S**

1999

H6L3

**P**



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS.

PS1999

Chap.

Copyright No. ....

*Shelf. 1-16 L3*

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA.





The Legend of

St. Olaf's Kirk.



BOSTON :  
ESTES & LAURIAT.  
1880.





The LEGEND of  
ST. OLAF'S KIRK.

*W. H.*  
BY  
GEORGE HOUGHTON,

Author of "CHRISTMAS BOOKLET," "SONGS FROM OVER THE SEA," "PENNY FOR YOUR  
THOUGHTS," "ALBUM LEAVES," "DRIFT FROM YORK HARBOR, MAINE," ETC.



BOSTON :  
ESTES & LAURIAT.

1880.

PS 1999  
.H6 L3

Copyright 1880, GEO. W. W. HOUGHTON.



## CONTENTS.

### PART FIRST.

|   | PAGE |
|---|------|
| <i>Valborg,</i> . . . . .               | 5    |
| <i>Axel and Prince Hakon,</i> . . . . . | 11   |
| <i>The King's Birthday,</i> . . . . .   | 14   |
| <i>The Spaaquinn,</i> . . . . .         | 20   |
| <i>St. Olaf's Kirk,</i> . . . . .       | 25   |
| <i>The Bells,</i> . . . . .             | 33   |

### PART SECOND.

|  |    |
|--|----|
| <i>The Strange Knight,</i> . . . . .       | 39 |
| <i>The Writing of the Sword,</i> . . . . . | 46 |
| <i>The Feast of Welcome,</i> . . . . .     | 53 |
| <i>The Foray,</i> . . . . .                | 58 |



## PART FIRST.

*Scene, Norway. Period, Anno Domini 1150.*

---

### I. VALBORG.

His name was Axel Tordsen ; Valborg, hers.  
In Norway both were nurtured, whose green vales,  
Tucked in between the shadows of snow horns,  
Have cradled many a hero ; Nidaros  
Their home,—now Thronðheim, throne-home of the kings,  
And still the crowning-place. Of royal strain  
Was Axel, boon companion of the Prince ;  
And she was kin to both, the last sad gift  
Of fair Wynhilda, lady of the court,  
Who, new to motherhood, had from a swoon  
Aroused, asked that the little one be set  
Before her, kissed it once or twice, moaned low,  
And with large, wistful eyes still fixed on it,  
Telling the anguish the poor lips could not,  
Had wept, turned sidewise that she yet might gaze,  
And died thus gazing. Whereupon, the babe,  
Awed by the sudden stillness, ceased to wail,  
And from a near room, echo like, arose  
The sobbing of another, fuller lunged,—  
The man-child Axel.

Comely Valborg grew ;  
Her wondrous eyes, blue as the summer sky,  
Were brimmed with sunshine, overflowed, and filled

With something of their own sweet gladness all  
Who fathomed them,—all save the haughty Queen,  
Who on one fete-night, seeing from afar  
The girl's slight figure slip from group to group,  
Welcomed by all folk, to King Magnus leaned  
And whispered: "Is it well our daughter's moon  
Be thus outsplendored?" Whereto he replied:  
"Have patience, Thora; when our son 's of age  
Two daughters shalt thou mother."

Axel's eyes

Oft sought for Valborg, and flashed gray to black  
When at the lattice he espied her face  
Watching the squires at training; and in turn  
Her own shone bluer, seeing him foremost,  
Or darkened when departure seemed at hand,  
And buckling on his trouviere, yelp of dogs  
And bray of horns long following, he crossed  
The frozen Elv, red with the northern glow,  
To track the moose and reindeer. Smileless then,  
She strayed into the court, marked where he trod,  
Sipped from the gourd just tasted by his lips,  
Caressed the she-bear that his hand had touched,  
And for a half-hour felt her feet less light,  
Her fingers clumsier.

"Valborg," asked the Queen  
One morning as the menfolk went away,  
The Prince and Axel 'mong them, and dull-eyed  
The girl took up her goldthread,—“Valborg, child,  
I find thy judgment clear; which deemest thou  
The fairest of these youths?”

Knowing she blushed

Valborg looked down, and answered soberly:  
“I have no right to judge,—I saw but one.”

“Which one was that?” pursued the Queen, and slipped  
One arm about her, drawing her more close.

But Valborg would not tell.

Even from that day

The Princess dressed no costlier, and when next  
The yule-log blazed, and from each drifted grange  
Was thrust an unthreshed barley sheaf to give  
The snow-birds greeting, 'mong her gifts shone forth  
A jeweled harp, together with these words  
From Thora: “Child, thy tongue with this in tune  
Will sometime call a courtier to thy feet;  
Choose then the likeliest, who can offer thee  
Most honor; try the time-beat of his pulse,  
And woman's wit will prompt thee by which lay,  
Plaintive or glad, love-warmed or valorous,  
To leash and tether him.”

Thereby it came

That Friar Knud, the tutor of the Prince,  
Was bidden to teach its use; and week by week  
With lessening weariness and growing love  
Her deft hands learned to chase the melody  
From string to string through mazy harmonies,  
Until the instrument, jealous at first  
And obstinate, became a willing slave,  
Seemed part of her, and Valborg and her harp  
Were mouthpiece of the household. Winter nights,  
When weary with long sloth the roisterers lounged  
About the men's-hall, yawning for clear sky,  
Sudden the clamor of their tongues would cease,  
The air grow clearer so the rafters came  
In sight, and from them, like a summer rain  
To dry and pinched-up herbage, softly fall  
The warm, sweet restfulness of voice and strings.

Sometimes she sang old sagas, the ripe verse  
Of song-smiths from a vigorous age long past,  
Fresh with salt sea-breeze, warm with lusty blood,  
Filling their hearts with June, and bringing them  
Whose knees were 'neath the tables, beard to beard  
And horn to horn with Olaf's merry court,—  
The elders silent, glad to hear retold  
The tales, familiar, of their downthrown gods,  
Not utterly unloved though altarless.  
Again she led them, following the flight  
Of Leif the lucky, who with raven guide  
Hounding the sun, first pierced that shadowy realm,  
The Sea of Darkness, and in the sounding surf  
Off Kjalarness in Vinland boldly pitched  
His seat-posts, bidding them swim forth and find  
Convenient harborage. This tale of Leif  
Was like a wand that felled their frosty walls,  
Shot sunlight 'cross the sea-crests, and above  
Upon the mirror of o'er-roofing heaven,  
Mirage-like trembling into form, disclosed  
The wonders of the West,—that long-lost land  
Where summer played the truant all the year,  
Where brooks sang over beds of gravelly gold,  
And native grapes, ungrafted and untilled,  
Trailed purpling to the greensward, broken-skinned  
And bubbling forth their sweetness.

When she ceased

Deep silence followed, every face intent  
Upon the firebrands, till some whaleman spake  
Of seeing ersttime in an Iceland home  
A copper bowl, long handled, brought by Leif  
From over-seas, wherefrom (the legend ran)  
The Vinlanders quaffed fire, were for a space

*Valborg.*

Consumed, and when the wreathing smoke had cleared,  
Behold! they had cast off their slough of years  
And were grown sound and jocund.

Whereupon

Some youth would link his story to the last,  
Saying he had from Vinland fresher news  
By three half centuries, and pass around  
A strange brown bean, banded and streakt with blood,  
Wrecked by the breakers of a sou'west gale  
Upon the holm-bar.

Then with flagging speech

Again all eyes would turn to Valborg's harp,  
And unasked she would answer. All folk loved  
The blue-eyed singer,—Axel not the least.  
She called him “brother Axel,” but one eve  
He answered: “Valborg, do not call me that,  
For sometime, when I 've gained my spurs of gold,  
And ride, a knight-at-arms by Magnus,—wife  
I wish to make thee.”

“Yes,” she said, “I know.”

“Who told thee?”

“No one,—no one but thyself.”

“I never said so.”

“Nor was there the need.”

Now when the moon was high, and Axel slipped  
Together with the Prince beneath the robes  
Of cat and wolfskin, chattering from the cold,  
He told Prince Hakon this, who looked at him  
With eyes less kind than common, but no word  
To show he listened. Close to Hakon's side  
He nestled, and soon slept; but long the Prince  
Lay wide-eyed, restless, tossing to and fro,



*The Legend of St. Olaf's Kirk.*

Long hearkened to the riot in the hall,  
To pouring mead, to spinning of stone dice  
'Neath heavy fists that smote the gammon-boards,  
And to the breathing, easy as a babe's,  
Of him whose limbs lay warm against his own ;  
And when the sleeper's hand was toward him turned  
Bore on it, till a sigh escaped the lips  
Beside him, and a voice as from a dream  
Cried, " Hakon, help me ! " while a soft, warm arm  
Stole o'er and tightened 'round him ; then unclasp'd,  
As if the help it sued for had been found.

## II. AXEL AND PRINCE HAKON.

---

Three years took wings. Axel, now grown a man,  
Had won his spurs and place beside his king.  
No more a squire, a squire attended him ;  
And in his chamber, one of the royal suite,  
Hung many a shield quartered in blue and white,  
Broad-gashed and war-stained, trophies of proud days  
When he with picked companions hip to hip,  
Had flung the foes of Norland from her bounds.  
His glance was like an eagle's, straight and keen,  
And added to the vigor of his words  
Sunbeams or lightning.

One May morn it fell  
As Valborg came from minster, ere her hands  
Could lend each other succor and escape  
She found them both in Axel's. "Valborg, mine,  
To others prodigal thou art with song ;  
Sing once to me, that I may feel the words  
(Perchance more telltale to thy harp than me,)  
Are mine and only mine ; promise me this !"  
And Valborg promised, and the hour was set.

That night it rained, with puffs of gusty wind  
Fresh from the snow horns. But he minded not,  
And long before the time stood closely cloaked  
Below the oriel in the women's court ;  
Whence looking up he saw the curtains sway,

Saw the bright outlines of a harp and one  
Behind it robed in white, and heard her say,  
As to the bevy of girls who circled her :  
“ A minne-song I promised ; here it is,  
And to the ears that give the closest heed  
Belong the words.”

Melodious began  
The prelude, rich with changing symphonies,  
Sending the world far spinning into space  
And lifting the rapt listener to a realm  
Of finer feeling. Then above the strings  
Arose her voice, first like a far-off sigh,  
Betokening love's beginnings, wordless still ;  
Now gaining confidence, and flushed with hope  
Climbing to higher, ever gladdening strains ;  
Till buried by the deepening chords, the voice  
Was lost and all the melody confused.  
There seemed vague wanderings without a goal,  
Hovering of wings without the power of flight,  
A seeking for some unknown, needful thing,  
A sweeping of the strings to find one note  
That ever, as she followed it, took flight ;  
And when at last it hovered within grasp,  
And voice and harp arose in unison  
To snare the perfect ending,—with a twang  
The string brake off, and with a timorous cry  
The note escaped and the unfinished song  
Clashed into dissonance.

She started up,  
Pushed from her breast the quivering instrument,  
And from the window—suddenly become  
A hollow of gloom within the gloomy wall,—  
There fell a myrtle spray. He stooped for it,

And rising suddenly, sidewise perceived  
A shadow in an angle of the wall,  
That crouched, and crawling, stealthily drew back ;  
Then heeding the low challenge Axel sent,  
Retreated to the gateway. " By what right,"  
Spoke Axel fiercely, " art thou straggler here ? "

" Same right as thine,—because it is my will."

" And now, because I will it, get thee gone ! "

A moment passed. The stranger stood his ground,  
Strode forward, threatening, then fell back a pace ;  
From rattling scabbards whipped two blades of steel  
With lightning flash, slitting the robe of night,  
Then tried their temper once, and twice, and thrice,  
Clashing out sparks. The shadow's line grew less  
In height as if the stature 'neath it dropped  
Upon the kneec, and panting for fresh air  
The stranger flung his cloak aside,—when lo !  
The crown-prince shrank behind it, lips apart,  
Trembling with rage, and lifting a white hand  
Sware lifelong vengeance.

Knowing naught of this  
Or of his foe, but fearing that some plot  
Or treachery might menace, Axel crept  
Within the court, and by the barbican  
Kept secret guard until the sentinels  
Were changed, and from the towers the trumpeters  
Aroused the echoes from their eyries perched  
Among the hills o'erhead, and one by one  
Undid the eyelids of the drowsy town.

### III. THE KING'S BIRTHDAY.

---

In hay-month fell the King's birth-festival,  
When at the north in ever visible course  
The red sun circled, linking week to week,  
Wedding the passionate noonday with its mild,  
Sweet counterfeit, the drowsy midnight, roused  
From sleep by soft caresses of the sun.  
With gay processions and unstinted feasts  
The day was honored, and this fiftieth  
The King had set his heart upon to mark  
With unused pageantry,—part urged by pride,  
Part forecast of those hasty musterings  
When Dovre's cliffs, with terrible shouts of war  
Far echoing, should snatch their ox-pelt shields  
And hurl a hurricane of brand and sword  
Upon the valleys; or the fiord awake  
To find its highway to the offing stopped  
By pirate craft,—times when the Norland crown  
Might any hour be banded, fist to fist,  
By any who begrudged it. As chief prize,  
The helt foremost in mounted fray might claim  
The key to Norland's treasures,—landed rights,  
Or lordship, privilege, wife of high degree,—  
The choice of any largess that the throne  
Had at disposal.

Until noon was past  
The field was given up to ruder sports:

*The King's Birthday.*

Foot-races, free to all, and feats of strength,  
Pleasing the commoners, to whose loud mouths  
Success or utter rout seemed quite the same  
So long as there were roughness.

Then the joust ;  
Each fresh-groomed steed from stables of the King,  
Chosen for him from many a royal mews  
Sacked by freebooters,—some from Angle-land  
Or shores of Normandy, some Spanish bred,  
Fleet-hoof'd Arabians ; and the knights that rode,  
Dukes, jarls and herzers, haughty and light-haired,  
Were all of royal lineage,—at their head  
Prince Hakon, ruddy faced, and by his side  
Sir Axel, younger by a year, and slight.  
The last all loved, and as his stallion passed  
The stagings, cheers went up, and not a few  
Laid wagers on him.

“ Valborg,” said the Prince,  
“ The spaaquinn tells me that success this day  
Lies in thy riband. Pray thee, let it plume  
My helmet.”

“ Pardon, liege, but half of it  
Already reddens one.”

He answered not,  
But at the bugle beck, mid rounds of cheers,  
Across the plain captained his waiting corps,  
Steel clad, sonorous, sending back the sun  
A thousand lightning flashes ; and thick dust  
Uprolling, covered where they went.

For hours  
The warring lasted ; pair by pair they strove,  
Till now there rested only two, the Prince  
And Axel. When these gained the middle field,

And Axel saw his foeman and was told  
This was the finish, letting fall his lance :  
“ My liege the King, to him award the prize  
It best becomes,—I, Axel, do withdraw ! ”

The King, well minded it should be so : “ Son,—  
And well we wish thou wert our second son,—  
So be it, and to thee the second choice,  
E'en though it be our daughter, and with her  
A moiety of our kingship after us.—  
Name then thy choice ! ”

But meanwhile, 'mong the mob  
Of herders, whalermen and horn-handed folk  
Fresh from the ox-goad and the kemelin,  
There rose a tumult ; fierce to see the end,  
These in the ominous pause beheld the last  
And daintiest of their day's sport plucked away,—  
And some held weighty wagers thus undone,  
While others, more remote and knowing' not  
The cause, launched loud-mouthed rumors 'gainst the Prince  
Of foul play,—that Sir Axel had been drugged,  
That threats withheld his hands, elsewhere so strong,  
In favor of the Prince, dislike of whom,  
Or at the best indifference, to flame  
Flashed suddenly. Quick through the rabble ran  
The lust of mutiny : “ Axel, let us see ! ”  
“ They 've butchered him ! ”—“ The Prince dealt evil blow ! ”  
“ We will have Axel ! ”

Which news having flown  
By hurrying messengers to the smiling King,  
And with his own eyes seeing here and there  
The bounds thrown down and a tumultuous mob  
Approaching, quick he bade his trumpeter



*The King's Birthday.*

Shout forth this proclamation : " Hold your peace !  
The prize is not yet dowered ; still remain  
Two swords unsplintered ; Axel with the Prince  
Will now try metal. Thus the throne decrees ! "

One minute, and before the herald's cheeks  
Had lost their swollenness, the freshening breeze  
Had blown the message into every ear ;  
And from the tall hills round about came back  
The words, seven times repeated : " Throne decrees ! "  
" Decrees ! " and—" Thus the throne decrees ! " So died  
The clamor, and the summer storm was stilled.  
The sea of sand, wrecked o'er with shattered steel,  
Lay sparkling ; and the curious sun, half hid  
Behind a gathering cloud-bank, dallied, flushed  
With interest. Two shapes of bronze stood forth  
The horsemen,—one with helmet favorless,  
One flecked with sparks of red, that had withstood  
The rain of forty lances.

Like a week  
Of days, this day to Valborg ; since high noon  
She had kept place upon the highest bench  
Where Axel left her, these words on his lips :  
" Hither will I look up, as to green hills  
Flashing with rivulets, and find new strength."  
Below, the courtiers quarreled o'er their cups,  
And toasting her cried, " Hail to Hakon, too ! "  
And the grave King, vexed that his wish and will  
Had thus been thwarted, prone upon his lounge  
Was somewhat less than king.

" Let us go down,"  
Said Malford, Valborg's maid.

" Nay, nay, my girl ;

*The Legend of St. Olaf's Kirk.*

It is for them that fight, and not for us  
Mere lookers-on, to faint." But pale her cheeks;  
Each whistling sword-sweep seemed to steal her breath,  
His name alone found audience at her ear,  
His helm alone shone through the dusty air,  
And each hurt horseman that they carried past,  
Blood-stained, disheveled, arms hung dangling down,  
Was Axel, with white face upturned to hers,  
Her favor still upon him.

"Valborg, child,"

The Queen said, "Courage yet!" See where they come!  
Our Hakon's besom now hath swept the field  
Of all save one; so have no further fear,  
For he is oak-strong, and his foe, though lithe  
And willowy, hath less persistence."

Pale

With sudden giddiness, down on her knees  
Dropt Valborg, like a lily broken-stemmed;  
Lightly they bore her to the royal booth,  
Where, whispering in her ear, again the Queen  
Spoke kindly: "For Saint Olaf's sake, arouse!  
And Hakon, conqueror, soon shall make thee well."

But like one dead the maiden lies; hears not  
The clash of steel as round the field they edge,  
Horseless and bleeding, both with broken swords,  
Mid closing circle of spectators, dumb  
With dread and hoarseness;—sees not through the dust  
The thrust and parry of their battered blades,  
Their visors up to freshen the scant air,  
Their staggering steps, the fast descending dusk;—  
Feels not the chill of the uprising gale,  
As all the gray west piles with mountain clouds,

*The King's Birthday.*

Black-browed and threatening. She must waken now !  
A din of tongues and trumpets tells the end,  
And Axel, crowned as victor, from the shield  
And shoulders of his seconds sliding down,  
Thrusts back the screens and bursts into the booth  
Exclaiming : " This, O King, I claim ! " — But no,  
She gives no welcome. And when loud and harsh  
Like a wroth bear, the nearing thunder growls,  
And in confusion from the benches pour  
The people townward, stormed by wind and rain,  
Still 'neath the tent-skin lies, as if asleep,  
Wynhilda's daughter, fairest of the court,  
And chiefest prize of this day's tournament.

#### IV. THE SPAAQUINN.

---

Right merrily the months rolled. On her hand  
Now Valborg wore a slender link of gold,  
One link, and slender as a daisy's stem,—  
But from it trailed unseen a thousand links  
That bound her life to Axel, her betrothed ;  
And on her bosom lay the silver lamb  
That he had hung there, bounding at each breath.  
Among her maids she sat, and smiled to hear  
St. Olaf's chimes ring out their vespers. Glad  
The bells seemed with her, and she smiled to think  
How soon their calling would be meant for her.  
The flames she watched lapping the logs of spruce,  
And with them let her fancy climb and fall,  
Breathed hard and harder, felt her face aflame,  
Until, before she knew it, wet with tears  
Her cheeks shone, and the wondering maids drew close  
To press the reason, twining round her neck  
Their fair, white arms, and burying their cheeks  
Upon her breast to hide their own wet lashes.  
"Sweet mistress, why shouldst thou have thought of grief?  
They say that to be good is to be glad,  
And thou art like an angel in this place."

"Forgive me, dear ones, but I only weep  
For too much gladness,—more than I deserve,  
For I have lodged an idol in my heart,  
And that is sinful."

*The Spaaquinn.*

With a sudden shriek  
That brought the frightened listeners to their feet,  
She rose and started backward, as an owl  
Down fluttered from the gable to the warmth,  
Fire-blinded; and with beating, aimless wings  
Smote 'gainst her as it passed, and at her feet  
Let drop a little feathery fall, snow white,  
Of ruffled plumage.

“Christ’s name!” cried the maids,  
“Put by thy marriage till the grass-month comes;  
This bears some evil import.”

With a smile  
She shamed their counsel, saying: “Fear no ill!  
St. Olaf sounds the vespers; drowsy-brained  
I had forgotten, and this bird was sent  
To bid me. Let us go.”

One only stayed,  
The timid Malford, Valborg’s favorite maid,  
Who murmured as the silken curtains sank  
Behind them, “What it means I do not know,  
But thing more ominous than that!” She stooped  
And sought the feathers (seven there were), and brought  
Them to the chiefest prophet, who was called  
The Spaaquinn, saying: “Mother, read for me  
The wisdom of this plumage.”

Then the witch  
Each feather pointing, pierced a small blue vein  
In the girl’s wrist, and on a parchment wrote  
Seven words, one word with each; and each red word  
Was fellow to the others,—each was “Year.”

“Unravel further,” gasped the maid. But dumb  
The shriveled lips became, while through the door

The feathers fluttered, taking to themselves  
The semblance of a crow, that trailed a gloom  
Across the bare fields as it southward sailed,  
Sent back hoarse croakings, passed the yews, and now,  
Low hovering 'bove the foot-hills, slowly dimmed  
To nothingness.

From the gray, empty sky  
The girl turned wonderingly, pushed toward the seer  
A little pile of silver, and again  
Said softly, "Mother, make the writing plain,  
I cannot ken it;" to the doorway drew  
Until her heel lay 'gainst the threshold, stood  
Large-eyed and open-mouthed, as if spell-bound;  
And from the mutterings of the spaaquinn's trance  
Caught here and there new cause for terror.

"Out!

Ye carrion that call vultures, out on ye!  
If scarlet, draggling in your purple gore  
Be spotted, be it ripp'd and ragg'd and sown  
Upon the hurricane! —The years' long scroll  
Unrolls and shouts their secrets. Girl, behold!  
I see the writing of these feathers wrought  
In flaming words, like crinkled lightning scrawled  
Across the sky. Read through my withered eyes!  
Behind white Dovre drops the sun, and leaves  
A night unmooned for four-score tardy months,—  
Unstarred save by a lurid comet. Lo!  
Now blossoms the late morn, with blaze of warmth  
That sets the whole world dancing, keeping time  
To its own laughter. They who grieved are glad,  
And find but witchery in the sidewise glance  
Of such as I am. But bend down thine ear,

And hear'st thou not the rumbling of the ice  
Far underneath the powdery crust of snow,  
That chaps beneath the sun-heat? Nearer sweeps  
The babel of its voices, like the blast  
Of wild fjeld-slayers from the mountain clefts,  
Or giddy smoke-squall; and a hurricane  
Of sudden ruin smites the empty throne;  
While through the raining ashes, twice,—aye thrice,  
Our Norland's coronet crashes to the ground,  
Spilling its jewels; and beside it grovel  
Two spurred and armored men, blood on their lips;  
And by them,—many warriors weeping near,—  
Lies prone, a sceptre in her nerveless grasp,  
This virgin wife, this queen unscarleted,—  
Saint Valborg of the owlet plumes."

Of this  
Naught to her mistress told the shuddering girl,  
But when to the warm room the group returned  
From their devotions, Malford being maid  
Remained with Valborg after all had gone,  
Unlaced her jacket, loosed her stomacher,  
And freed from its light snood her flaxen hair  
Down flowing o'er her bosom to her knees,  
Still tarrying that by chance there might arise  
Excuse for words.

"Art thou not slow to-night,  
And weary, Malford?"

"Mistress, slow I am,  
But not from weariness. I only think  
'Twere well to wait the grass-month. 'Twere not long,  
And sometimes waiting is the wisest speed.  
I beg thee take it kindly."

Two white hands



*The Legend of St. Olaf's Kirk.*

Fell on the speaker's shoulders : " Malford, mine,  
I know thou lovest me and wishest well ;  
But little maid, who now for full five suns  
Hast been a sister to me, art thou sure  
Thy love is quite unselfish ? It may be.  
Without so meaning, thou wouldst dally time  
That thou mayst longer feel my room thine own,  
That thou mayst cling the longer close to me,  
No other having right to come between.  
Is it not so ? "

“ Nay, nay, thou wrongest me !  
I do so love thee that thy joy is mine.”

“Then press me not to put off one short hour  
That fuller cup to-morrow offers me.  
I know the fear that thou hast felt to-day,  
But let the portent promise what it will  
Scarce could it more unhappiness foretell  
Than this delay thou wishest. Many moons  
Already I have waited, patiently  
Living on hope, but hope too long put off  
Will starve the soul, nor is the pain less keen  
Nor death less pitiful than if our strength  
Were drained by dogwood. Malford, mine, good night !”

## V. ST. OLAF'S KIRK.

---

Full of sweet promise smiled on Olaf's walls  
The moonlit morn, and joyously the bells  
Tossed down their benedictions. Late the fall,  
But mild ; the luminous air was crystal clear,  
And as the visits of the sun were short,  
At his first gleam above the glowing north  
Wide open swung the gates of iron and oak,  
And from the King's house towering 'bove the town  
Forth rumbled the court chariots. Like a prince  
Rode Axel, with the royal coach-and-six,  
The King beside him ; and behind these came  
The Queen and Valborg. All the streets were choked  
With people, thronging to the minster square,  
While from the roofs above them rained green sprays  
Of holly and of Christ-thorn, and the breeze  
Bellied a thousand banners.

At the kirk  
Each passed before the stoup, crossing himself,  
Then entered ; and behind the bridal train  
Swept in the multitude. The rites began.  
The pageant of procession lent the aisles  
A noonday splendor, and the unseen choir  
Seemed like an angel chorus shouting down  
Their hallelujahs and their glad amens.  
In stately order moved the ritual, led  
By Rome's vicegerent, ranked above the King,  
The good Archbishop Eiwen, richly stoled

And golden mitred, no tiara'd pope  
E'er loved or venerated more.

Then rose  
And stood forth Blackfriar Knud: "In the name of God,  
These bans I do forbid. Behold the law,  
That none of kin shall marry; here I hold  
The pedigrees of those thou wouldest bind,  
And here discover that by fourth degree  
These two are kindred: Sturlsen, sire of one,  
The cousin-german of Dame Gudrun, aunt  
To Axel Torsen."

Still as death became  
The thronging aisles.

"The record also shows  
That at the font in Highborg both were dipped;  
And by the selfsame nurse, a year between,  
These two were suckled."

The Archbishop spoke:  
"What envious tongue has fired thy pious zeal?"

"That bears not, Father. I but point the facts,  
My finger on these dates; you, Father, ken  
The clavis and the moment of these laws  
The Church hath made."

Then followed hot debate.  
Twelve clerks were called, whose goose-quills being trim'd,  
Rose one by one, and in as many shapes  
Set forth the case, repeating ages, names,  
Till they who hearkened half forgot their own.  
The hoary Bishop from the altar came  
To vouch the parchment scrolls; and Erland too,  
Archdeacon and most learn'd in law, stepped down  
To note the clavis. Two long hours or more

The clerks heaped round them ponderous registers,  
Ramparts of vellum, till at last the monks  
Came empty-fisted from the cloister shelves,  
Finding no others.

Restless grew the crowd,  
Weary with waiting. Now and then arose  
Rough voices: "Less of law, more justice give us."  
"What haggard monk, this Knud,—is he the Prince  
Costuming?" "Where, then, skulks the Prince?"

At this

Axel unlocked the arms that circled his,  
Strode down the steps to where Prince Hakon stood,  
And said, low-voiced, though not a word was lost:  
"My cousin, from a boy thou 'st been with me,  
Known my each thought and wish, and well hast known  
My noblest thought, my dearest wish, was this.  
If then thy lips can fashion any word  
To silence this contention, speak it now,  
And prove our love is mutual. If thy will,  
Unwittingly, I've crossed in anything,  
Speak now, that I may know the seeming wrong  
And haste to right it."

"Why appeal to me?  
Of what concern to me this clerly strife?"

—"The same that 'tis to me, my cousin Prince,  
If thy love be the same as mine toward thee."

"I am no law-wright, nor hath my tongue skill  
To lick laws from their tablets."

"But art thou  
The breath enkindling them? Forgive me, cousin;  
I doubt thee not, but speak and silence these!"

"As for the pack, if barking please their throats,  
Why, let them clamor! Commons have that right,  
And welcome! As for thee, Sir Knight, doubt not,  
For as to thee I have been, so I am."

The red robe of Prince Hakon, Axel kissed,  
And answered: "I believe thee."

Now the kirk  
Grew still as if no breathing thing were there  
To lend the sunshine motes; and when at last  
There came a sound, it was the Bishop's voice,  
Who with uplifted hands and jeweled staff  
Bade silence, and with measured, echoing words  
Proclaimed: "The Chapter hath defined the law,  
And we, as guardian of the Church's faith,  
Which ye do all respect, these bans forbid!"

Then to the pair, who speechless stood, he gave  
A table-spread, bade each to hold an end,  
And with clear voice: "As we, the Church's arm,  
With this estramacon do smite in twain  
The texture of this fabric" (here he stretched  
The blade between the two, cleaving the cloth),  
"So for all time to come, till time be done,  
And the all-mother take you to her breast,  
Do we estrange your bodies and your lives;  
Break ye no bread together!"

To their feet  
Ran the white raveled ends. From Valborg's wrists  
He loosed and took the golden ornaments,  
Slipped off her spousal ring, undid the chain  
Clasping her amulet,—a silver lamb,  
That leapt and sank between her rounded breasts,—

And gave to Axel ; who receiving all  
In the hollow of his palm, looked now at them,  
Now vacantly at Valborg, then strode down,  
Flinging the baubles into empty air ;  
And following where they fell, jingling like bells  
On Olaf's baldachin : " By the white Christ,  
Whom I acknowledge,—Olaf, patron saint,  
And all that's holy ! if I wed not her  
Then go I henceforth widowed ! And in place  
Of helm and doublet, will I hide myself  
In cowl and sackcloth ; ne'er again be called  
' Sir Axel, knight and soldier,' ne'er again  
Sip bubbling mead, or look in woman's eyes ;  
But smeared with ashes will I cloak myself  
From the fair world and smiling face of day,  
And like a sneaking cat-goupe waste my years  
In some vile hill-hole."

Then with thin, hard voice  
Spake Valborg : " Better so than disobey  
The Church, our blessed mother. Glad are they  
Who breathe a little time love's mountain air,  
And catch a glimpse of life's broad pasturings.  
Regret not ! What we have been, that we are,  
Each day the riper fruit of yesterday.  
I, too, will now forswear the world, will go  
With the sweet sisters to their peaceful home  
Upon the hills. I, too, will spouse myself  
A bride to the white Christ. Good-bye ! Good-bye !  
My brother ! Rest content. I am content !"

But as she spake, the telltale tears gushed forth,  
Giving the lie ; and all undone by sobs  
She flung herself upon him, clung to him,

Kissed his thin lips, and lifting a clenched hand  
Against the white-stoled Bishop, with the rage  
Of a wild creature cursed his hallowed name ;  
Then heavily sank, lying in death-like swoon,  
And silence filled the aisles. Sharply without  
Were heard the scraping of dead twigs, and drip  
Of frost-damp from the gargoyles' grinning jaws,  
Smiting the pebbles.

On their heads they felt  
The Bishop's consecrated hands, and heard :  
" May Christ's baptism of peace descend on these !  
Christ pitieth them that grieve, loveth them best ;  
In Him shall ye find comfort. Bear in mind  
That life is short, and duty its chief end,  
Not earthly joys,—the right its own reward ;  
And now to wed, unless the Church of Rome  
Gave special unction, were to barter heaven  
For this world's pottage."

—" Father," Axel cried,  
Breaking upon the blessing, " Is there then  
One star unswallowed by the monster night  
That now encompasses me ? Speak, Father ! Can  
The maker unmake ? Can the Pope enswathe  
And coffin, if he will, this loathsome law,  
Long dead—as with my finger I might point  
'Mong them before us,—and with papal key  
Lock down forever this unrighteous ghost  
Now fronting me ?"

" He has all power, my son."

" To Rome then go I ! God ! am I an owl  
To wink thus blindly, thinking a shorn poll  
Stuff to outbalance justice ! Golden words !



Once more a soul they give me ; now once more  
Life's pathway opens, and the world holds out  
Its million helping hands, willing and strong,  
That beckon Romeward."

" Hard the journey is."

" A soldier counts not hardships."

" Perilous,—

Through trackless wildernesses, hostile hordes,  
Snow-hills, morasses and malarial climes."

" Strong-bodied, I fear neither foe nor clime."

" And long the marches ; years must pass before  
Thou canst return."

" That, truly, do I dread ;

But if thou, Valborg, hast the heart to wait,  
I will be patient. What say'st thou to that ?"

Valborg looked up.

" If I go forth to Rome,

And by thus going, gain again the right

To claim thee, Valborg,—how long wilt thou wait ?"

" Forever, Axel."

" What say'st thou to that,

My Father, is that time enough ? Love-spurred,

I will outwing the wild swans in their flight !

Your blessing, Father ; I will start this day,

And every mile-stone that I put between

Her feet and mine, will whisper to myself :

' One mile the nearer Valborg ! ' "

Tenderly

*The Legend of St. Olaf's Kirk.*

The blessing fell, and with the words rare tears  
Of sympathy upon his flaxen hair,  
Those holiest of holy water drops ;  
Then many hands sought his, whose trembling grasp  
Told why no words came with them.

“ Rome ! to Rome ! ”

Rang through the aisles, and at the Bishop's beck  
The choir pealed forth a triumph seldom heard  
Save when the kings went forth to war, and loud  
The bells responded. With few, common words  
The lovers said farewell, swore faith to each,  
Then turned to part,—when Axel, wheeling round,  
Cried : “ Valborg, ere we give a last good-bye,  
A sign we'll leave here of our mutual vow.”

Leading, he sought the portal of the kirk,  
And halting, stood before a tower of talc,  
That sprang from the gray pavement to the roof.  
Then plucking from its sheath his soldier's sword  
He channeled in the stone the letter “ A,”  
For Axel ; then to Valborg gave the sword,  
Who wrought upon and over this, a “ V,”  
Forming a cypher.

“ See ! ” he cried, “ We two,  
Though severed this day once, once more are bound ;  
By this I pledge my faith, by this record  
Thy promise made before these witnesses ;  
And when again my eyes salute this sign,  
By this, O Valborg, will I claim thee mine ! ”

## VI. THE BELLS.

---

“To Rome! to Rome!” rang through the bustling town.  
This way and that ran men; and women, full  
Of care, made show of doing some small thing  
To tell their sympathy.

The elder folk  
Counseled less speed, but Axel only said:  
“To sooner start is sooner to return,  
And claim to a short life an added lease.”

So escort was prepared to strengthen him  
Till he should cross the treacherous Dovrefjeld,  
His arms were furbished, rations wrapped in skins  
New willow rackets fitted to his feet,  
And thousand things tucked in his saddlebags  
As kindly as uncalled-for. Letters three,  
In runic characters fair writ by monks,  
The Bishop gave him,—making audience sure,  
And setting forth the object of his quest  
And pilgrimage.

At one o'clock, both sky  
And sea were overcast, and a damp chill  
Pierced all who worked not. In an hour more  
The autumn sun sank down, and when the smith,  
Lacking for light, looked up to see who darkened  
His doorway, clouds he saw, and flakes of snow  
Whirling in millions, burying fast the town;  
While Dovre, Roros and the Kjolen horns

Were peak'd snowdrifts, heaven a snowdrift too,  
All colorless as a universe unborn.  
At three the streets were dark ; a gusty wind,  
Bleak from the sea, growled at each unbarred door,  
And from the open roofs snatched burning tufts  
Of vrac, that chased the smoke-clouds and but made  
The gathering gloom the thicker.

Axel stood  
Within the smithy : " Come man, you must end,  
Or with three shoes we travel."

" Master, nay !  
Sally not forth this night ! All yesterday  
The air was filled with partridges, whose flight  
Foretold the coming of a northeast snow ;  
And if I read the weather-sign aright  
That racks this shoulder-blade of mine,—King's head !  
'Tis no mere flurry threatens."

Breaking off,  
He glanced across his shoulder to the door,  
Dropped from between his knees the stallion's hoof,  
And straightening himself flung off his cap  
To welcome a new comer. —Lo ! the King !  
Who shook the snow-flakes from his cloak, and said :  
" Wait but a week, Sir Knight, and we will find  
Fit escort for thee. Pick thou from our band  
Of men-at-arms a score that please thee best ;  
These will we freely grant, a horse to each,  
And a fleet ship, provisioned and well manned,  
To make the Danish coast. Rash-willed it were  
This night to risk the roads, buried so deep  
That roads there are not. But one week from now,  
Or when, thereafter, first the moon peeps through  
Heaven's curtains, go,—our blessing following thee."

Thence Axel sought his chamber, tried to sleep,  
But could not ; rose again, and made his way  
Into the men's-hall, where the night was noised  
With gammon-board and mungat ; watched the sparks  
Leap snapping to the wainscoting, or fly  
Straight upward through the vent-hole into night.  
Warm was his welcome, but he found the words  
Unmeaning, and could only pace the floor,  
Like a strong creature pent within a cage,  
And measure with his ear the deepening drifts  
That walled his passage. Stepping to the door  
He slipped the iron hasp ; a mighty force  
Tugged at the door-string, and he faced the wind ;  
Felt glad to feel its buffets on his cheeks,  
Felt glad to wage war with it, and strode out  
'Gainst snow and tempest.

Long within her room  
Sat Valborg, lonely, head upon her harp.  
She tried to sing his favorite song, but failing,  
Slipt wearily to bed. Hour after hour  
She lay and listened, till at last she lost  
The sense of hearing, and the household slept.  
Sudden she wakened, stifling, and arose  
Upon one elbow, wide-eyed. What was that,—  
A footstep at her door? Soft slipping down  
From the warm hollow of her eider nest,  
She ran and pushed the curtains to one side :  
“ What wilt thou ? ”

But no answer was sent back.

Returning to her bed she flung herself  
Face downward, and a torrent of hot tears,  
And sobs escaped her. Rousing from deep sleep

*The Legend of St. Olaf's Kirk.*

Her maid arose and joined her, and in fright  
Cried : " Mistress, art thou ill? "

" No, no, not ill,  
But thirsting, Malford ; bring me some cool draught. "

She stood there in the fire-lit room, alone.  
Again she seemed to hear the curtains stir ;  
Was it the wind ? The flickers built tall forms  
That stalked the floor, and whispers of the night  
Ran through the fire-glow, sending to her cheeks  
A flush that was not fever. Ere it fled,  
The girl's voice : " Mistress, here I have your cup. "

She touched it not, but through the dimness leaned  
And to her bosom drew the drowsy girl,  
And kissed, and kissed her on the lips and neck ;  
Then tried again to sleep, but dreamt wild dreams,  
Now seeing Axel's corse, with Olaf's walls,  
All swathed in mourning wraps ; now leaping up,  
Thinking she felt his breathing burn her face.

All night the fine snow piled upon the roofs  
And drifted 'gainst the doorways ; all next day,  
And still the next and next, it fell and fell.  
A fortnight more no horse could find the road.  
The third week Axel started. The King rode down,  
A hundred knights at heels and half the town  
Beside him ; bade godspeed, and to his belt  
A broadsword hung, saying : " Be true as this !  
Remember thou art soldier of our crown,  
And lend thine arm and this to each just cause,  
Fearing no foe. " Sir Asbiorn too was there ;  
And Father Eiwen, who upon his face

His thin hands laid : " My son, whose bed I hoped  
To consecrate with hyssop, thy return  
I may not welcome, but our Valborg will,  
And thou wilt find her still the same. May Christ  
Go with thee, and in safety bring thee back."

At kirk knelt Valborg, the cold altar stone  
Reeling beneath her. Filled with choking grief  
She could not say good-bye, but by a page  
Her rosary sent him ; and when he had climbed  
His horse, and on the far-off bridge she heard  
The dull tramp of his troopers, up she fared  
By stair and ladder to the bellman's post,—  
For he was mute, and could not nettle her  
With words' cheap guise of sympathy. There perched  
Beside him up among the dusty bells,  
She pushed her face between the mullions, looked  
Across the world of snow, lighted like day  
By moon and moor-ild ; saw with misty eyes  
A gleam of steel, an eagle's feather tall ;  
And through the clear air watched it, tossing, pass  
Across the sea-line ; saw the ship lift sail  
And blow to southward, catching light and shade  
As 'mong the sheers and skerries it picked out  
A crooked pathway ; saw it round the ness,  
And, catching one last flicker of the moon,  
Fade into nothingness. With desolate steps  
She left the bellman and crept down the stairs ;  
Heard all the air re-echoing : " He is gone !"—  
Felt a great sob behind her lips, and tears  
Flooding the sluices of her eyes ; turned toward  
The empty town, and for the first time saw  
That Nidaros was small and irksome, felt

*The Legend of St. Olaf's Kirk.*

First time her tether galling, and, by heaven !  
Wished she'd been born a man-child, free to fare  
Unhindered through the world's wide pastures, free  
To stand this hour with Axel, as his squire,  
And with him brave the sea-breeze. Aimlessly  
She sought the scattered gold-threads that had formed  
Life's glowing texture ; but how dull they seemed !  
How bootless the long waste of lagging weeks,  
With dull do-over of mean drudgeries,  
And miserable cheer of pitying mouths  
Whistling and whipping through small round of change  
Their cowering pack of saw and circumstance !  
How slow the crutches of the limping years !



## PART SECOND.

*Scene, the same ; period, about 1157.*

---

### VII. THE STRANGE KNIGHT.

Seven years were passed, when on a summer night  
(In hay-month, so they tell it), with worn horse  
A warrior came from southward.

In his train

A dozen horsemen rode, strangely attired,  
And full of quip and laughter, school-boy like ;  
But not a word he uttered. 'Cross a bridge  
He spurred, the twelve close clattering by his side,  
Recalling stories from their beardless age,—  
But not a word he uttered. Then another,  
And there were six behind him, spurring too,  
Leaving the finish of their tales untold,—  
But not a word he uttered. And at length,  
When he had crossed a third, he rode alone ;  
Heard nothing save his stallion's hoofs and breath,  
Felt but the pounding of his saddle-gear,  
Saw nothing, till his horse, well winded, lagged.  
Then looking up he found the heavy road  
'Tween Domaas and Fokstuen well-nigh passed ;  
Before him lay the level way to Jerkin,  
And 'round, the Dovre-fjeld, a waste of moss  
And heather, whence the ptarmigan arose,  
And buzzards circling prey, with here and there

*The Legend of St. Olaf's Kirk.*

A lonely tarn made noisy by the loons ;  
While the snow horns, above, were glorious  
With dazzling day.

Buried once more in thought  
He rode on steadily, nor looked again  
Till on an eminence he slackened rein,  
Beholding to the north a tiny town,  
Far, far to northward, backed against a hill,—  
Three leagues perhaps, but in the luminous air  
'Twas but a league, and every little thing  
Shone forth in detail. Well he knew those towers,  
That long-kirk, and the glittering holm alive  
With fishing smack. Each sight and scent and sound  
Spoke to him, saying "Welcome!" Still the air,  
But filled with small, sweet noises : plaint of gulls,  
Circling their young, the flight of cormorants,  
Waves lapping on a beach ; nearer at hand  
Brooks babbling, larches talking low together ;  
And from the vales below, under the hills,  
The far, faint buzz of labor, that now seemed  
A pleasant pastime, and he longed to stand  
Among the workers, working to be found.

Passed were the lichen belt and gloom of pines ;  
Now here and there were foot-paths, saeter-huts,  
And herds of grazing cattle, that looked up  
And turned mild eyes upon him. With each step  
The grass grew taller, greener. Waist-deep stood  
The oat-fields, o'er whose billowy green, now ploughed  
By the swift pinions of the passing wind,  
Slow sailed the brown cloud-shadows. Further down  
Were strawberries, tempting the stray passer-by,  
Forget-me-nots leaning above the streams,

*The Strange Knight.*

Small gardens green with leeks and clambering beans ;  
And by the roadside, daisies spilled milk-white  
And poppies marked his pathway.

Turning back  
He found none following, and dropping down  
Wetted his kerchief in a spring, to cool  
His pulse. Was this indeed fair Nidaros,—  
His home, and Valborg's? Springing on his horse  
Again he galloped, loose of rein, his spurs  
Red-spotted, white his horse's flanks ; heard not  
The ocean nor the whistle of his plume,  
Saw only Nidaros, heard but his heart  
Loud thumping on his mail.

Again he paused  
Upon a knoll, and saw the town more near,  
Its glimmering spires, broad clusters of black roofs,  
The streets deserted, for 'twas early yet,  
And on the hill beyond, the walls and towers  
Of Norway's monarch. Then came sudden fear.  
A chill ran over him, his breath grew short ;  
Glad to be near, his purpose well-nigh failed,  
And but for pride he would have turned and fled,  
As from a foe too terrible to face.  
He tried to calm himself, an old air hummed.  
Why had he hurried so ? Were some one here  
To bear him company, 'twere less forlorn !  
He saw no human being, and he seemed  
The world's last, lone inhabitant. Should he  
Await the coming of his followers ? No,  
His lips were far too full. 'Twas better thus ;  
Unspoken to, he had no need to speak.  
“ But by the saints ! ” (forgetting that he came  
Unheralded), “ The welcome's cold enough !

*The Legend of St. Olaf's Kirk.*

These might have sent me greeting and a troop  
To ward me."

Then alighting from his horse,  
He went on slowly. What if she were gone?  
The thought was like an axe-blow, that descends  
And stops all power of thinking. Walking still  
His feet forgot their way, and looking up  
He found a cliff before him. Halting short,  
He swept his glove before his eyes as if  
To brush away a cobweb. Wed she could not;  
Her promise, was it not, "I'll wait forever?"  
But there is bridegroom that hath but to ask,  
And though the maid hold back and look abashed,  
And shriek denial,—seizing her slim wrist,  
Blue-veined, Death makes her mistress.

Now he stopped,  
Feeling the air all tremulous with the noise  
Of sweet-mouthed bells, whose voices had so oft  
Brought peace and comfort. Fountains were his eyes,  
And one great sob burst from him; then glad-faced  
He walked on, surer footed, toward the road.  
Regaining it he heard a girlish voice  
Climbing the hill, and with it came the girl,—  
A swine-herd, slight, brown-ankled, hardly weaned  
When he left Nidaros.

"Good-day to thee!  
Know'st thou the lady Valborg? Fares she well?"

Biting her herd-staff, "Sir, I do not."

Grave  
His eyes became. "Where do you live? Is this  
Not Nidaros 'neath us?"

"It is Nidaros,

And there I live."

Slowly he faltered on,  
His step grown ten years older. Presently  
A rattling cart approached, and to the wight  
Who drove he beckoned, thinking to himself,  
How quick this fellow's heels will fly to bear  
The news loud-mouthed unto the waking town.  
"Know'st thou the soldier Axel?"

"Axel?—no;

He tarries not in Nidaros, that I know;  
And it is better thus; too many swords  
Fatten already, father says, upon  
Our hard-earned substance."

"This to thy father take  
To give him cause for impudence!" His cloak  
Upflew, as with his lance's hilt he smote  
The cowering knave, showing his vest of chain.

Marking the smoke that followed from the wheels  
Fast disappearing, Axel sate him down,  
Nor looked again until upon his face  
He felt hot breath, and close beside him stood  
His war-horse. Resting thus, he heard below  
More hoof-beats, and a mule came leisurely,  
Bearing a woman loaded down with stuffs  
And candles for the abbey. And it seemed  
When she drew near, that in her face he traced  
Outlines not unfamiliar. Coarse her garb,  
But whole and span clean, and in form and mein  
A gentlewoman.

"Greeting! Canst thou tell  
A stranger where good Father Eiwen dwells?  
I would salute him."

*The Legend of St. Olaf's Kirk.*

On her breast she crossed  
Her palms: "Heaven bless him, he's long dead."

The knight  
Knelt, crossing too. "And lady Valborg,—say!  
Does she yet live here? Has she gone away?"

"Nay, nay, sire! She still lives in Nidaros,  
The sweetest woman of the Gildish race.  
No wonder that the king well loves her."

— "King!"

What king?"

King Hakon,—but you see she trothed  
A helt, Sir Axel; who by some strange law,  
(I never fathomed it), rode forth to Rome  
Some seven years back, and, as the chances were,  
Returned not."

"Does this lady love the King?"

"They say so, and that seven trothed years elapsed  
She'll be our queen; e'en now they clepe her thus  
In whispers. Not a half hour since I saw  
Her enter at the minster; speed thy horse,  
Thou'lt see the fairest face in Norland when  
She steps from matins."

"Thank thee much, but first,—  
I used in Nidaros to call each child  
By name; but long ago, and faces change,  
And also names, when girls that wear them bloom  
As fair as one I think of;—at the font  
Wert thou not christened Adelaide?"

"I was."

"Thy sire, Sir Asbiorn?"

"Was, and is, thank God!"

*The Strange Knight.*

And though this Hakon's bitter hate, because  
He 'friended Axel, has clipped off his spurs,  
There lives none kindlier, stauncher to his word,  
More loyal to the crown."

"That well I know;  
To me he is a father, and with thee  
I claim a brotherhood. Why, Adelaide!  
Know'st thou not Axel Tordsen? I am he!  
And by this blade that Hakon's father hung  
Beside me, saying, 'Be but thou true as this,  
Lending thine arm and this to each just cause,'  
Sir Asbiorn shall again wear gilded spurs,  
And thou white samite!" But of Valborg now,—  
I would gain audience with her, and at once."

Then by the roadside talking, all was planned;  
And as the messenger of Adelaide,  
Whom Valborg loved, he rode toward Nidaros,—  
Rode furiously, but ever as he flew  
Was outraced by the wings of his desire.

## VIII. THE WRITING OF THE SWORD.

---

The King, followed by Valborg and her maids,  
Swept down the aisle from matins, while behind  
Curtsied the courtiers. Leaving these she sought  
The shrine of Mary, bright with yellow flames,  
And on it hung a pair of outspread wings  
Wrought in fresh wax: "O blessed Mother, speed  
His flight! Thou knowest, Mother, my long years  
Of watching, full of faith; and how my path  
Is hedged about and darkened. Bend thine ear,  
O blessed mediator! Hear my prayer,  
And give me my beloved!"

Looking up,  
Her face still radiant with earnestness,  
The King stood waiting: "Lady, for thy weal  
I still press suit. Why longer waste the years  
And thy best bloom by flying in the face  
Of fortune? Is it then such luckless fate  
That when one lover fails thee, there should come  
A second, offering thee, with equal love,  
A queenship? Let us now put by the past,  
And make the present ours. Thy plighted troth  
I have respected; it is now fulfilled"

"Nay, nay! My troth is lifelong."

"Be it so;

But lifelong as to Axel, not to thee!

The death of one breaks every covenant seal,



And gives the other freedom. Doubt ye still?  
The Chapter shall consider it. If they  
Judge otherwise and say thou still art bound,  
Then will I no more follow thee,"

“Too fast !

Thine eloquence outfoots thy logic, sire,  
For to begin with,—Axel is not dead !”

“I fain would please thee, Valborg, if I could ;  
I sympathize, for I too am bereft  
And brotherless. But Axel is no more.  
I have a courier just come back from Rome,  
Who on his trail long followed, and now tells,  
That unavailing being Axel’s quest  
He joined a Rhenish court (to thee we’ll give  
The names and dates), was to a princess wed,  
Found fame in war, and fell in an affray  
Long moons past. Thou shalt look upon his sword,  
And weigh the proofs. We find them sadly strong,  
And have on yester-night made every plan  
To celebrate to-morrow, with due pomp,  
The burial service of our cousin and friend,  
The soldier Axel.”

“Have a care, my liege !

I doubt thy servile courier ! Have a care  
That when the empty tomb is ’neath these stones,  
And wax-illuminated has become the shrine  
Of every soldier, Axel come not back  
In life, more terrible than sheeted ghost,  
And blight thy hasty zeal.”

“Say thou the word,  
And we will wait a month.”

“Wait then a month,

*The Legend of St. Olaf's Kirk.*

And set thy sawyers and thy quarry-men  
To building 'bove the earth, not underneath,—  
For triumph, not for mourning. Axel comes!  
This yester-night when thou hast lost thy sleep  
With planning pageants for an idle day,  
I dreamt, and needed not the spaaquinn's sight  
To spell the vision. Axel comes apace!  
Fetch here thy lying henchman,—he shall feel  
This altar trembling 'neath a soldier's tread,  
And shake with ague pains. Lag but a month,  
And, by my soul! there'll come new cause for lagging."

While this was said, the stranger gained the kirk,  
Slid through the portal, dense with staring saints,  
Dipped finger at the stoup, and snugly wrapt  
Entered the grove of stone and hid beneath  
The trunk of a gray pillar. Standing there  
He watched the courtiers hasten to the street,  
And ladies pausing till the choir had ceased,  
Malford still lingering, and by her he knew  
That Valborg was not distant; then the King,  
Whose foot-falls brought his hand upon his hilt,  
Only to drop it, feeling his own feet  
Pull toward the scarlet; and the old-time love  
That bound him to the boy-prince flashed again,  
And fain would he have fallen, kissing him.

Then Valborg came, upon one finger-tip  
Poising a circlet of forget-me-nots,  
Pale blue; and all else having left she sought  
The portal near where Axel crouched concealed;  
And halting, stood before a tower of tale,  
That sprang from the chief corner-stone, and rose

Like a huge oak-trunk to the vaulted roof,  
Where with a hundred more it intermeshed  
Its branches with the gloom. Then with one hand  
She loosed the faded yester flowers, which like  
A ring'd aureola inclosed the sign  
That he and she had carved, and with the other  
Replaced it with the fresh wreath, murmuring low :  
“ Hail, love ! good-morning ! ”

As a page would kneel  
Kneelt Axel, without words ; pushed out his glove,  
And held the letter sent by Adelaide.  
He felt it from his fingers slip to hers,  
He heard her say, “ It comes from Adelaide,”  
He heard the wax seal crackle as it brake,  
And waited for her answer,—breathing hard,  
Scarce able to keep back a wild, loud cry  
That struggled in his throat,—his left hand close  
Upon the telltale armor, lest his heart  
Should noise its secret to the jingling links,  
And they to Valborg. Fast she chased the words,  
Then read and re-read, too much dazed to pluck  
The meaning from them, panting, stormed by doubts,  
And fearing treachery. Thus ran the words :

“ To Lady Valborg. greeting ! Courage yet !  
Thy seven-years waiting now is nearly done ;  
The horns of Dovre have saluted him,  
And while thou thinkest not, he shall approach,  
And when thou knowest not, before thy feet  
Kneel and salute thee.”

“ Who, lad, gave you this ? ”

“ The Lady Adelaide.”

“ And sent no sign

Whence she received it ? ”

“ Lady, yes ; ”

And 'neath his mantle tugging at his throat,  
He loosed the rosary that there had hung  
Since he left Nidaros, and handed her.

“ Where is the giver ? ”

“ He awaits your word.”

“ Up, lad, and fly ! and tell him Valborg waits.”

Then suddenly before her rose the tall,  
Cloak'd stranger, leaning 'gainst the wall of stone,  
Lest giddy, he pitch headlong at her feet,  
Let fall his mantle, and in coat-of-mail,  
Bronze-faced and whiskered, Axel stood before her ;  
And blindly, for his eyes were drowned with joy,  
Stretched forth his arms and found her.

When at length

These two came streetward, Hakon and his court  
Had passed ; but 'round the Knight a curious throng  
Soon hovered, peering at his arms and dress,  
The tongue-tied bellman 'mong them, who pushed close,  
And starting back, his wrinkled face all smiles,  
Dropt on his knees ; then nimbler than was wont  
Sped to the dusty bell-loft 'mong the bells,  
Made their mouths his, and they, wagging their tongues,  
With shout and laughter and loud, musical runs  
Told all the city, crying : “ Axel's come !  
He's come—come ! Oh ! he's come—come ! ”

“ What's afoot ? ”

The King asked, loitering from the barbican,  
And looking valleyward ; “ What mean these shouts,

This crowd, this jubilee?"

"They mean—they mean—"

A courier gasped, speaking between quick breaths,—

"They mean that Axel's come, and up the street

Rides, Valborg at his side, and at their backs

The rabble wild, uncovered, casting flowers,

And crying: 'Long live Axel! who was dead,

But now comes back to be our king!' And close

In front ride galloping all your men-at-arms,

As dazed and crazed as the rest."

With quick commands

The King withdrew within his walls; creaking

The gates swung on their hinges, hidden springs

Burst through the moats, loud roaring, and aloft

Blazed flags of threat, and mail of armed men

With fire and missiles.

These things being known,

The Knight alighted, and a messenger sent:

"Fair cousin, peace I bring; no thought of harm

Possesses-me. I went but to return,

And now, my seven-year questing being done,

I come again, my liege's loyal held,

Ready to war if there need be of war,

And need of me, but for him, not against;

My arms the arms that thine own father gave,—

Companions, men who with the King were bred.

Naught else have I save a small parchment scroll

Sewn in my mantle, that the Pope addressed

To the first bishop, which if thou wilt read,

Most innocent thou'lt find of treachery

Or treason 'gainst the realm, save only this,

That I have come to rob the Norland crown

Of the most precious pearl that brightens it,—

*The Legend of St. Olaf's Kirk.*

The Lady Valborg. Cousin, I greet thee fair ! ”

An hour or more the couriers were afoot,  
Then down the drawbridge thundered on the moat,  
Linking once more the kingdom with its king.

## IX. THE FEAST OF WELCOME.

---

No sleep that night. All folk were in the streets,  
Laughing and garrulous ; the shouting bells  
Called in the herdsmen and the herring fleet,  
Curious to know the news, and patiently  
To each fresh comer was the story told,  
With each retelling gathering incident,  
Until it grew a marvelous fairy tale,  
And Axel a great king, whose thousand knights,  
From playing quoits with coronets, had now  
Returned to dower Norland with their wealth ;  
And they who listened looked to see the south  
A bristling forest of huge bottoms, slow,  
And wallowing to the gunwales, overtasked  
With precious burthen.

Lavish feast was spread.  
And all invited,—a rich barbecue  
Filling the kirk-square ; and to every mouth  
Was served its measure of sweet barley bread,  
With herring, smoking trenchers savory  
With ven'son brisket, bear's ham, and its fill  
Of milk or mungat. High above their heads  
Who elbowed to the tables, and above  
The minster's topmost finials, the King's hill  
Was circled by a twinkling diadem  
Of torch and bonfire ; and the halls and courts  
Of Hakon's house were thronged with merry guests  
Off'ring their clamorous welcome to the Knight,

*The Legend of St. Olaf's Kirk.*

Who sat at table, Valborg at his side,  
Clinking his silver cup to all who came.

But now the feast was ended ; the men's-hall  
Was cleared of all save those who served the throne,  
While Axel, seated at the King's right hand  
Upon the high-seat, Valborg close beside  
To catch each syllable,—to hungry ears  
Rehearsed the history of his seven years' quest ;  
Which seemed, as he recalled them, looking back  
O'er changing scenes, now sunny, now forlorn,  
Close trooping on the heels of others, still  
More strange and more impossible to paint,—  
Like seven long lifetimes.

With clear, rapid speech  
He caught and led his audience. Up the Rhine  
He rowed them, pausing on his oars to point  
Its royal cities and staunch fortresses  
The Romans builded ; pierced with devious course  
The upper country, dense with virgin woods,  
And sparsely peopled by strange, roving clans  
Still headed westward, hearing on sand shores  
The far-off drum-beat of the ocean waves  
Sounding the summons, " Onward !" Now arose  
The white horns of that Norland of the south,  
Helvetia, wrapped about by thunder-caps ;  
And guided by the witch-wand of his voice  
They passed the grim Black Forest, painfully  
Mounted the foot-hills, and with rackets shod  
Forced passage by their pike-staves through the clefts  
Of niggard Alpine passes, choked by ice  
And wrack of avalanches. Then, glad-faced,  
To Italy's fair summerland they came,



And following the highways straightway reached  
Its capital ; beheld white palaces  
Ashimmer with the sun-heat, mighty domes  
That mimicked heaven's pantheon, gates of brass,  
Through which shone glimpses of the papal state,  
And granite arches thrusting to the sky  
The blazonry of Rome's imperial past.  
They tracked its streets, with wonder looked upon  
And wonder looking ; mingled with the tides  
That swept to senate, bath and circus, eyed  
And elbowed by a bustling world, strange-faced,  
Strange-habited, speaking the Leden tongue.  
Then with quick pulse he sought the papal See,  
And kissed the pious robe of Urban, pope  
And father of kings.

Here pausing in his tale,  
Fresh skins of wine were broken, and glad harps  
Sang hallelujahs.

Now the journey home,  
With long delays and constant war with fate ;  
Now swooped on by freebooters, and compelled  
To pay rich ransom for a captured mate ;  
Now beaten back by far outnumbering hordes ;  
Now forced by pitfalls to forsake worn paths  
And circuit trackless wildernesses, lost  
And famished ; now a prisoner, serving time  
In sky-perched eyries, with fierce feudal lords,  
Till he should purchase liberty, each league  
The price of blood, or time—more precious still.  
Two years he lingered tracking down the Rhine ;  
Was tripped at Mauth-thurm by its robber-knight,  
And forced to serve his river-toll ; again  
At Falkenberg ; then Sooneck's slender tower

Choked the great highway, and long time he bode,  
And then at Furstenberg, and Drachenfels  
New-built.

Burning were his words, and they  
Who listened saw the bending river pour  
Before them, saw its dark ravines, each topped  
By a gray castle, crouching panther-like  
Above the bridle-path, hungry for game.  
They tasted the plump grapes that he had plucked,  
They felt the sting of capture, and with him  
Grew pale in donjons.

Then with changing state,  
Having snatched victory to his victors' grasp,  
The purses at his waist grew fat with fees,  
And by proud dukes he rode an equal, sued  
To swear allegiance, take for wife his pick  
From loveliest of the ladies, and become  
The fellow of crowned heads. Fearing denial  
He lingered, prisoner bound by golden chain ;  
Joined in their forays, and bent down by spoil  
Returned at night to where the pitch-pots glowed ;  
Strode through the bustling courtyard, all ablaze  
With feudal splendor, and at wasteful feasts  
Brimmed beaker. Then by winding stairway mounting  
He sought his chamber, whose rich tapestries  
Stiff with embroidery of silk and gold  
Conquered the darkness, making night alive  
With peacocks, pecking jewels from the grass,  
Lithe tigers lapped in sunshine tropical,  
And palm-trees splendid in a sunset glow ;  
But the bright colors of the figures blurred,  
As though they flickered neath a breathing wind  
Swaying the cloths ; he felt the hateful chains

*The Feast of Welcome.*

Snap from his ankles, and the stifling air  
Grow fresh, as if a rising gale swept down  
From Kjolen's clefts; and leaping to his feet,  
Eyes swimming,—with alert resolve aroused  
His mates, slipt leash, and under cover of fog  
Again pushed forward.

Thus the story ran,  
And as he spake, each listener seemed a part  
Of that he spake of.

With one hand in his,  
Sat Valborg, drinking his warm eloquence,  
Feeling her small horizon stretch away  
Into dim distance, and her heart's desire  
Leap like a flame toward higher destinies.  
Then looking in his flashing, restless eyes,  
She nestled closer in his circling arm,  
Thought Nidaros first city in the world  
While he stayed, and with restful indolence  
Cared not at all which way life's pathway led  
So long as he walked with her. Glad she was  
To feel that Olaf's town was very small,  
And she no more could lose him. Dear old town!  
Its every house-front, by-way and green tree,  
How fair to her! Rome, lapped in luxury,  
Queen, mistress of the world, could not compare  
With Axel's home, the laughing Nidaros!

## X. THE FORAY.

---

With breaking of the daydawn, suddenly  
Sprang Axel from the dais and the grasp  
Of Valborg, crying: "But my men-at-arms,  
Where then are they?"

Finding them not yet come,  
And yet another glass running to waste  
Without disclosing cause, with troop of horse  
He sallied forth to seek them. For long hours  
He followed up the river Nid, and then  
The roaring Gula, scoured the mountain roads;  
And when the sun was highest on the hills,  
He came upon fresh signs of combat, gouts  
Of blood and shattered lances on a bridge,  
A dead steed floating 'neath it; and near by  
Each rocky fastness held a hundred foes  
Prowling by stealth to pounce upon the town;  
But who, it seemed, beholding as they came  
War-signs about the palace, flags awake  
And drawbridge lifted, thought their presence known,  
And lemming-like had burrowed. On the scouts  
Rushed from their ambush ragged-bearded men,  
Shirted with beersercks, hairy head to heel,  
With shields of pelt, and in their wake a few  
Rich-doubleted, upon whose brazen shields  
A wolf's head threatened, by whose hungry eyes  
Quick Axel read the menace; these the hordes  
Of Oppeland, King Amund at their head,

With swarms of wildmen nursed on Dovre's heights,  
Fierce as the bears they lived among,—as wolves  
Thirsty for rapine.

Then with bell and smoke  
King Hakon called his liege-lords, closed with clang  
The city gates behind him, and hied forth,  
Sir Axel at his side, to keep at bay  
This pirate from the south, whose jealousy  
His father had bequeathed him. From tall hills  
Down looking, he beheld unnumbered bands  
Ascending and descending; while remote  
Upon the coast-line, 'gainst the dingy west,  
The flicker as of many wings, cloud-white,  
Told where the fleet lay, pouring on the beach  
Fresh tides of warriors.

“Sire,” Axel spake,  
“’Twere best to make short business of this siege:  
My counsel this: ’Neath cover of to-night,  
When if the signs fail not, there will be wind  
And rainfall, to dispatch a band of scouts  
By twisted path to where the war-ships swim;  
There light huge firebrands, which, when Amund sniffs  
And sees the low clouds reddened by their glow,  
Will lure him from the hills, thinking his boats  
Endangered; and descending by the gorge,  
There suddenly, while he is broken-ranked,  
We’ll rain upon him a bewildering storm  
Of stones and arrows.”

Thus the snare was laid,  
And when the bells tolled midnight, ’bove the beach  
A dull glare pierced the heavens, and at dawn  
King Hakon from the rocks looked down upon  
His foes caged in by cliffs, and with loud cries

His army leapt upon them. Brief the fray  
But murderous, for thinking his reserve  
Was severed, Amund losing hope of help  
Fought rashly, seeing not his sons at hand,  
And ere they came, was massacred.

Then short  
The victors turned to break the second band ;  
But weary with much slaughter, and now faced  
By equal and fresh forces, long the strife,  
Till they who from the city watched, now ceased  
Their watching, for the night-fog covered all ;  
And till the King, seeing his spearmen flagged,  
And that the bowmen lacked for shafts, called up  
His troopers, and with Axel at his side,  
Into the thick of it flung his battle-blade.  
Like troll-stones beat upon him shaft and axe,  
Till, borne down by the weight of many arms,  
From his tall horse he pitched, and o'er him howled  
A pack of hairy beersercks.

Seeing which,  
Came Axel spurring, and a blood-red path  
Cleft to him, dealing deathblows left and right,—  
An open swath, such as the mower cuts  
Through a ripe oat-field ; and behind him sped  
The footmen, who outran the mounted troop,—  
Hampered by dead and dying,—and unchiefed  
Strove onward, gaining courage with their speed,  
And never stopped till like a roaring wave  
Crashing upon the shore, they swept it clear.  
The wolf's eyes dimmed, the dukes of Oppeland,  
Fierce margraves, and the first of Amund's sons,  
Lay groveling in their heart's blood, while the few  
That gained the sea, there perished like poor flies ;

And the proud fleet, like tempest-driven birds,  
Flew seaward, drave their beaks into each other,  
And beached upon the skerries. Ne'er before  
Was seen such booty as that morrow poured  
Into proud Nidaros,—and ne'er again  
Such woeful tidings as were that day breathed  
To sobbing Nidaros. For when the dawn  
Lay bare the wreck of carnage, and the friars  
Toiled through the rock-clefts to relieve the quick,  
In a dark hollow walled about by rocks  
(The “Goal of Ghosts,” now called) the searchers spied  
Among the sprawling dead, two horsemen pierced  
By one another's spear-heads, bleeding still,  
Still quivering. And lo! when they were turned,  
This was their king, blood spots upon his lips;  
And this, the other, face down on a shield  
Quartered in blue and white, the people's pride  
And favorite, Sir Axel.

Dumb with awe  
They beckoned helpmates, did whate'er they could,  
Then summoned a confessor, who knelt close,  
And thus King Hakon breathed into his ear:  
“Before heaven's judgment-seat, whose cherubim  
Will soon salute me, it was I who dealt  
My comrade deathblow; blinded by the dust,  
Neither knew what he did; and he is blameless,—  
But not so I, for in my heart of hearts  
Have I in years gone-by oft mused on this,  
Envious of him, and murdered him in thought.  
Shrive me of this.”

Then Axel lifting moan,  
Hakon leaned toward him, and upon his brow  
Slipt the slight golden crest that marks a king;

And when the Knight, from stupor wakening,  
Gazed on the faces 'bout him, these last words  
Still lingered in his ears: "My cousin, this  
I give thee, cousin Axel, it is thine—  
And Valborg's. Living, I have done thee wrong,  
And done her wrong whom most of all I loved;  
Which dying, I do now repent. Forgive!  
Forgive me! This my will and testament,  
And these be witness: All I have is thine,—  
And Valborg's."

Tottering stiffly to his feet,  
And flinging the regalia from his brow:  
"My crown is other!" fiercely Axel cried;  
"Release me from this death-coat! Give me air!  
Would ye then stifle me! Make me a space  
For sweep of broad-sword! Do ye not behold  
A new foe challenges?"

Then changing mood,  
He pushed his hands out as a blind man would,  
And gasping, murmured: "Lay me at full length;  
My sword I need not longer; these gilt spurs  
No more become me, who have found a foe  
'Fore whom I cower. Hark! the bridal bells  
Mellow the morning air; they ring for me,  
And I am ready. Lo! the bride appears,  
In white apparel, snowdrops in her hair,—  
Welcome, ye pallid Death!"

With gentleness  
The monks laid off his armor piece by piece,  
Then caught him as he reeled into their arms,  
Nerveless, a broken lance-head in his side,  
And 'cross his neck and loins long gaping wounds,  
Bleeding red rivers.



*The Foray.*

“Lady Valborg call!  
And with her the Archbishop. Spare not speed!”

Mounting her palfrey she came galloping down,  
Thrusting aside the ministers of state  
And the red robes the people pressed on her,  
And crouching, held her breath till he should speak.

After a little time he moaned and stirred,  
Pushed under him one elbow, ran his hand  
Across her features, saying, “Is it thou?  
Then am I once more well,—but not for long.  
What must be done, must now be quickly done.  
Take my two hands in thine;—fear not to fret  
These scratches,—I have been more hurt, and healed.”  
Then hoarser voiced: “Draw nearer to my lips,—  
They are rebellious. Valborg, Valborg mine!  
Long time we’ve waited, but not all in vain;  
Love’s faith that waits and watches, fearing not,  
Makes life its own great recompense, and death  
Shall do the rest, sifting the right from wrong,  
And joining those erst parted. Valborg mine,  
My life-work were not finished were we twain;”—  
(Then to the Bishop), “Father, but confirm  
The sanction of the Pope, then shrive my soul,  
Aid bless us both.”

The eucharist received,  
He fell back feebly, drawing up his knees,  
And murmured huskily: “Sing, Valborg—sing  
That song,—thou knowst the one.”

Standing she sang,  
And ever and anon brake off for weeping,  
But found the phrase and with new strength of wing

*The Legend of St. Olaf's Kirk.*

Upbore it, caught the secret of the song,  
Flew with it heavenward, till the kneeling throng  
Looked up askance and crossed themselves: "Is this  
Our Valborg, or a vision?"

Tearless still,  
"I cannot more!" she said; then raised one shriek,  
For looking, Axel lay before her dead,  
His glazed eyes turned to her.

And when the friars  
From Axel's body help to lighten hers,  
She too had taken flight,—the virgin wife,  
The queen unscarleted,—flown with her song  
And him,—Saint Valborg of the owlet plumes.











LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



0 016 117 604 7

